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Issues concerning Mexican cattle on feedlots in the United States as reported in the United States National Animal Health Monitoring System 1994–1995 Cattle on Feed Evaluation

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Abstract

Producers participating in the United States National Animal Health Monitoring System 1994–1995 Cattle on Feed Evaluation provided information on cattle of Mexican origin in their feedlot operations. Cattle of Mexican origin accounted for 8.1% of cattle placed on United States feedlots from 1 July 1993 through 30 June 1994. Of operations with a one-time capacity of 1000 or more cattle, 12.8% placed cattle of Mexican origin on their feedlots over this time frame. Very few operations (about 1%) reported cattle of Mexican origin at the same time as cattle to be used for breeding in the United States.© 1997 Elsevier Science B.V.

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1. Introduction

With the advent of free trade in North America due to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the General Agreement for Tarrifs and Trade (GATT), concerns have arisen about possible dangers to United States disease control efforts due to cattle arriving from Mexico for feeding (Sheesley, 1994). Health concerns about these cattle center around the opportunity they might have to spread disease to the United States cattle population (National Research Council, 1994; USDA, 1992).

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Animal health concerns have been a major factor influencing NAFTA and GATT negotiations (Kellar, 1993; Sheesley, 1994). Quantitative risk assessment is taking the place of 'zero risk' policies in making international trade decisions (Kellar, 1993; Miller et al., 1993). With trade in animals and animal products expanding as a result of NAFTA and GATT, animal health concerns related to trade are expected to intensify (Wilson and Banks, 1993). These issues will drive the import of all feedlot animals in the future (Sheesley, 1994)

The United States National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) 1994–1995 Cattle on Feed Evaluation (COFE) was designed to answer a number of specific objective related to the United States cattle-on-feed industry (Losinger et al., 1997). One of the COFE's objectives was to determine the distribution of feedlots feeding cattle of Mexican origin in the United States, and to determine how these cattle were handled relative to other cattle in the same feedlot operations.

The objective of this paper is to report COFE results pertinent to the issue of Mexican-origin cattle on feedlots in the United States.

2. Materials and methods

The design of the COFE and estimation methods are described in a companion paper (Losinger et al., 1997). COFE participants were asked the number of cattle placed on their feedlot operations from 1 July 1993 through 30 June 1994, the percent of these cattle that were beef cattle originating in Mexico (and identified with an M brand on the right cheek), and the percent that were dairy cattle originating in Mexico (and identified with an M brand on the right cheek). In addition, producers were asked the number of bonded cattle from Mexico that were placed on the operation over the same time period. Operations with a one-time capacity of 1000 or more cattle were asked whether, from 1 July 1993 through 30 June 1994 they had ever fed cattle originating from Mexico at the same time as United States beef or dairy cattle to be used for breeding.

As described in the companion paper (Losinger et al., 1997), SUDAAN was used to create weighted national estimates and standard errors (Shah et al., 1996)

3. Results

Tables 1–4 present the information from the COFE on cattle of Mexican origin on United States feedlots. Between 1 July 1993 and 30 June 30 1994, $0.7 \pm 0.1\%$ of cattle

Table 1
Percent of cattle-on-feed operations that reported placing cattle of Mexican origin (and identified with an M brand on the right cheek) in their feedlots from 1 July 1993 through 30 June 1994

Type of cattle	Operations with capacity < 1000 cattle		Operations with capacity ≥ 1000 cattle		All operations	
	(%)	(SE)	(%)	(SE)	(%)	(SE)
Dairy cattle	0.1	0.1	1.6	0.3	0.2	0.1
Beef cattle	0.1	0.2	12.6	0.7	0.7	0.1
All cattle	0.1	0.1	12.8	0.7	0.7	0.1

Table 2
Percent of cattle placed on United States feedlot operations operations that were of Mexican origin (and identified with an M brand on the right cheek) from 1 July 1993 through 30 June 1994

Type of cattle	Operations with capacity < 1000 cattle		Operations with capacity ≥ 1000 cattle		All operations	
	(%)	(SE)	(%)	(SE)	(%)	(SE)
Dairy cattle	< 0.1	< 0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.1
Beef cattle	< 0.1	< 0.1	9.0	1.1	7.9	0.9
All cattle	< 0.1	< 0.1	9.2	1.1	8.1	1.0

Table 3
Percent of United States cattle-on-feed operations that placed bonded cattle from Mexico on their operations operations from 1 July 1993 through 30 June 1994

Operations with capacity < 1000 cattle		Operations with capacity ≥ 1000 cattle		All operations	
(%)	(SE)	(%)	(SE)	(%)	(SE)
< 0.1	< 0.1	0.9	0.2	< 0.1	< 0.1

Table 4
Percent of United States cattle-on-feed operations with a one-time capacity of ≥ 1000 cattle that reported feeding cattle originating from Mexico at the same time as United States cattle from 1 July 1993 through 30 June 1994

Percent of operations feeding Mexican-origin cattle and:	(%)	(SE)
U.S. beef cattle and calves to be used for breeding	1.1	0.4
U.S. dairy cattle and calves to be used for breeding	0.2	0.1

on feed operations had placed cattle of Mexican origin (Table 1). The total number of Mexican cattle placed during this time period represented 8.1 ± 1.0% of all cattle placed in feedlots in the 13 states included in the COFE (Table 2).

4. Discussion

One source of cattle from Mexico was bonded cattle (National Archives and Records Administration, 1994). Cattle from Mexico were permitted to enter the United States if the owner posted a bond. The bond was forfeited if the animals failed to return to Mexico. Few producers in the COFE reported feeding bonded cattle from Mexico from 1 July 1993 through 30 June 1994 (Table 3). Provisions of NAFTA eliminated the in-bond program in the second half of 1994 (Joseph VanTiem, USDA:APHIS:VS, Cattle Diseases and Surveillance Staff). The import of Holsteins from Mexico was banned altogether starting in 1993 (National Archives and Records Administration, 1994).

Mexican-origin cattle often spend approximately 18 months on pasture in the United States before reaching the feedlot (Joseph VanTiem, USDA:APHIS:VS, Cattle Diseases and Surveillance Staff). Contact between diseased cattle of Mexican origin and domestic feeder cattle on feedlots would pose little risk since most of the feeder cattle are destined for slaughter in a relatively short period of time (less than six months). However, some cattle in feedlots may be returned to grazing forage because of prevailing market conditions. The COFE showed $1.6 \pm 0.2\%$ of cattle returned to grazing forage (USDA, 1995).

It is increasingly common for breeding cattle, particularly replacement females, to be fed in feedlot settings to provide controlled and predictable gains, to assure adequate size when they are due to be bred and re-enter the herd, and potentially to facilitate estrus synchronization programs. A number of operations did report feeding breeding stock ($7.1 \pm 2.5\%$ of operations reported feeding beef animals to be used for breeding, and $0.3 \pm 0.2\%$ reported feeding dairy animals for breeding).

Very few cattle-on-feed operations reported feeding both cattle of Mexican origin and domestic breeding stock (Table 4). No information on the degree or level of contact between cattle of Mexican origin and domestic breeding stock was collected. The potential for contact may bear some consideration for on-going disease control programs.

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